

# **GUIDELINES FOR NRCS PLANNERS ON CRP OPENINGS**

## **For Use with 20<sup>th</sup> CRP Signup**

### **ESTABLISHMENT OF OPENINGS**

Under CP11, trees already established, the 15-20% in openings will be established by removing pine trees. The openings must be established during the first three years of the new contract, usually during the thinning process. Under CP3, tree planting, openings will be established by not planting pine trees on 15-20% of the area. These openings will be established during the tree planting process.

Openings under both CP3 and CP11 must have a minimum width of 60 feet. The 15 - 20% openings may be of various shapes and sizes. However, to optimize wildlife habitat and maintain the value of the timber resources, the openings should be located around the perimeter of the pine stand(s) or in large blocks adjacent to the pine stand(s). For tracts with several fields, the openings may be located within one field or spaced throughout the tract. Multiple openings spaced throughout the tract (instead of 1 large opening in 1 field) will help maximize benefits to wildlife and should be strongly recommended. If the location of the openings is rather complex, then the field office staffs are required to flag the location of the openings on the ground. However, if the location of the openings can be discerned from a map, then the locations may be marked on an aerial photo. Since the wildlife openings will have to be manipulated periodically for maintenance, choose areas that are accessible and have the least likelihood of erosion problems (e.g. avoid steepest slopes and streamside management zones).

### **ESTABLISHMENT OF VEGETATIVE COVER IN OPENINGS**

Openings may be established through planting or natural regeneration.

Planting: (Cost Share **is** available.)

Open areas must be planted to a CP4D/50-point cover of approved native grasses, legumes, forbs, and shrubs that are best suited for various wildlife species in the area (as described by the MS N1a cover matrix for CP4D). Therefore a mixed stand (minimum of 5 species) of either of the following:

- at least 2 native grasses and at least 2 shrub, forb, or legume species best suited for various wildlife species in the area. The 5<sup>th</sup> species may be either a native grass, shrub, forb, or legume suited for wildlife.
- at least 2 shrub species and at least 2 native grass, forb, or legume species best suited for various wildlife species in the area. The 5<sup>th</sup> species may be either a native grass, shrub, forb, or legume suited for wildlife.

Selected species and planting specifications must be recorded as part of the contract's conservation plan. Eligible plant species are listed in Table 1 – CRP Eligible Plants provided with the MS N1a Cover Matrix. **Bermudagrass, fescue, and sericea lespedeza are not acceptable grasses to plant in these openings since they are not desirable for wildlife.**

To increase diversity for wildlife, it is recommended that shrub planting should be done in ¼ acre plots, not to exceed 50% of the openings. Many shrub species provide more suitable wildlife benefits when planted in clumps. The minimum size is a 5-row X 5-row plot planted at the recommended spacing of the particular shrub species selected.

## **GUIDELINES FOR NRCS PLANNERS ON CRP OPENINGS (Cont.)**

Natural Regeneration: (Cost Share **not** available.)

Openings will not have to be planted unless erosion is a problem. In most areas of the state, natural succession will regenerate vegetation consisting of desirable grasses, legumes, forbs, and shrubs. Once the openings are created, suitable vegetation should become established within two years. At this time, NRCS will perform a spot check on openings with natural regeneration to certify that desirable plant species and sufficient (greater than 80%) ground cover are present. See Attachment 1 for desirable plant species established by natural regeneration and Attachment 2 for the certification form. It must be determined from this evaluation that there is a mixed stand of either of the following:

- at least 20% coverage in any eligible native grasses and at least 20% coverage in any combination of eligible shrub, forb, and/or legume species best suited for various wildlife species in the area. A minimum of 3 cover groups should be represented in the mixed stand.
- at least 20% coverage in any eligible shrub species and at least 20% coverage in any combination of eligible native grass, forb, and/or legume species best suited for various wildlife species in the area. A minimum of 3 cover groups should be represented in the mixed stand.

**In very rare cases where desirable vegetation does not regenerate or noxious weeds are the predominant plants, it will be necessary for the landowner to plant these areas with eligible species at the participant's expense.**

### **MAINTENANCE**

To maintain these openings throughout the life of the CRP contract, activities such as prescribed burning, mowing, or herbicide application will be necessary to prevent these openings from becoming established in woody vegetation. Such maintenance activities will also stimulate the production of important wildlife plants and reduce rank vegetative growth. However, mowing results in fewer wildlife benefits than any other maintenance method. Experience has shown that normally there should be some maintenance performed at least once every three years. For best results, the maintenance should **not** be done over the entire area at one time, but should be done on a staggered basis (e.g., one-third of the area each year). (Refer to NRCS Practice Code 647.)

Shrub lespedeza should be mowed and burned every three years. Protect other shrubs and surrounding trees from fire. Where burning is used, the Mississippi Forestry Commission must be contacted to obtain a burning permit. For the other shrubs, forbs, legumes, or native grasses, the competing vegetation around these plants should be controlled by herbicide spraying or mowing.

Measures must be provided to control severe outbreaks of noxious weeds and other invasive species. Spraying or other control of noxious weeds will be done on a "spot" basis to protect forbs and other plants that benefit wildlife.

**All maintenance activities will be conducted outside the CRP primary nesting period for wildlife, April 1 through August 15. However, to maximize wildlife nesting success and to promote the growth of desirable plants for wildlife, maintenance activities may be delayed until after October 1.**

**ATTACHMENT 1**  
**ELIGIBLE PLANT SPECIES FOR NATURAL REGENERATION OF 15-20% OPENINGS IN CP3,**  
**TREE PLANTING, AND CP11, TREES ALREADY ESTABLISHED**  
**CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM**  
**MISSISSIPPI**

**NATIVE GRASSES:**

Species

- |                                       |                                      |  |                                   |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Big Bluestem | <input type="checkbox"/> Broomsedge  | <input type="checkbox"/> Little Bluestem | <input type="checkbox"/> Paspalum |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Indiangrass  | <input type="checkbox"/> Panic Grass | <input type="checkbox"/> Foxtail         |                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> **Other:     |                                      |  |                                   |

**LEGUMES:**

Species

- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clover (native sp.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Lespedeza, Common | <input type="checkbox"/> Hairy or Woolly Pod Vetch     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Patridge Pea        | <input type="checkbox"/> Lespedeza, Kobe   | <input type="checkbox"/> Wild Winter Peas (Rough Peas) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Beggarweed          |  |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> **Other:            |  |  |

**FORBS:**

Species

- |   |                                      |  |                                     |
|---|--------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blackberry (native sp.)  | <input type="checkbox"/> Honeysuckle | <input type="checkbox"/> Wild Grapes     | <input type="checkbox"/> Greenbrier |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Woolly Croton (Goatweed) | <input type="checkbox"/> Ragweed     | <input type="checkbox"/> Wild Sunflowers | <input type="checkbox"/> Pokeweed   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wild Geranium            | <input type="checkbox"/> Wood Sorrel | <input type="checkbox"/> Smartweeds      | <input type="checkbox"/> Sedges     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> **Other:                 |                                      |  |                                     |

**SHRUBS:**

Species

- |   |   |  |                                    |
|---|---|--|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> American Beautyberry       | <input type="checkbox"/> Blueberry (native sp.)   | <input type="checkbox"/> Deerberry         | <input type="checkbox"/> Crabapple |
| <input type="checkbox"/> American Plum              | <input type="checkbox"/> Chokeberry (black & red) | <input type="checkbox"/> Dogwood           | <input type="checkbox"/> Hawthorn  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wild Plum (Chickasaw, etc) | <input type="checkbox"/> Elderberry               | <input type="checkbox"/> Serviceberry      | <input type="checkbox"/> Pawpaw    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Viburnum                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Huckleberry              | <input type="checkbox"/> Sassafras         | <input type="checkbox"/> Sumac     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Eastern Red Cedar          | <input type="checkbox"/> Holly (native sp.)       | <input type="checkbox"/> Holly (deciduous) |                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> **Other:                   |   |  |                                    |

\*\*Due to the wide variety of geographical areas and plant species which might naturally regenerate and be suitable for wildlife this listing may be incomplete. However, other species added must be approved by area/state biologists before they can be used.

ATTACHMENT 2  
CERTIFICATION OF PLANT SPECIES FOR NATURAL REGENERATION OF 15-20% OPENINGS  
IN CP3, TREE PLANTING, AND CP11, TREES ALREADY ESTABLISHED  
CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM  
MISSISSIPPI

NAME: COUNTY:

TRACT NUMBER: FARM NUMBER:

FIELD NUMBER(S):

DATE: CERTIFIED BY: (Signature) \_\_\_\_\_  
(Typed Name and Title)

I certify that a field evaluation was made to determine kinds and amounts of plant species currently present in fields offered for enrollment into CRP. This field evaluation was made on (date) \_\_\_\_\_. It was determined from this evaluation that there is a mixed stand of either of the following:

- at least 20% coverage in any eligible native grasses and at least 20% coverage in any eligible shrub, forb, and/or legume species best suited for various wildlife species in the area. A minimum of 3 cover groups should be represented in the mixed stand.
- at least 20% coverage in any eligible shrub species and at least 20% coverage in any eligible native grass, forb, and/or legume species best suited for various wildlife species in the area. A minimum of 3 cover groups should be represented in the mixed stand.

Cover Groups

% of area in mixture of any eligible species 1/ of native grasses,

% of area in mixture of any eligible species 1/ of legumes,

% of area in mixture of any eligible species 1/ of forbs,

% of area in mixture of any eligible species 1/ of shrubs or trees.

- ☐ Current composition and ground cover of this/these openings **is acceptable** to meet a 50-point cover of approved vegetation (as described by the Mississippi N1a cover matrix for CP4D) to provide suitable wildlife benefits and soil protection.
- ☐ Current composition and ground cover of this/these openings **is not acceptable** to 50-point cover of approved vegetation (as described by the Mississippi N1a cover matrix for CP4D) to provide suitable wildlife benefits and soil protection. Planting of eligible plant species 2/ is required to provide the wildlife benefits and soil protection desired.

- 1/ To be counted, species must be listed on Attachment 1 - ELIGIBLE PLANT SPECIES FOR NATURAL REGENERATION OF 15-20% OPENINGS **OR** be approved by the Area Biologist.
- 2/ Eligible plant species for planting are listed in Table 1 – CRP Eligible Plants (provided with the MS N1a Cover Matrix).